

# EPA to Remove Asbestos from Former Industrial Site

January 2023

**Nelson Knitting Site**  
Rockford, Illinois

## For more information

If you have questions or comments, please contact:

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*You may also call EPA toll-free:  
800-621-8431, weekdays, 8:00  
a.m. to 4:30 p.m.*

## Website

[response.epa.gov/nelsonknitting](https://response.epa.gov/nelsonknitting)



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will remove fallen asbestos material at the Nelson Knitting site, 909 S. Main St., Rockford, Illinois. Along with asbestos removal, the site team will also collect and dispose of other hazardous materials, including polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCB containing lighting fixtures, lead acid batteries, miscellaneous chemicals, mercury switches, and fluorescent light tubes. These materials at this site pose a threat to public health.

## What is being done to clean up the site?

The removal will begin in late January and will take approximately six weeks to complete. You may see crew members wearing protective gear entering the site via the parking lot of the Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum and Gardens, located left of the site. This area will serve as the staging area for the removal crew. See Image 3 for details. Crews will dispose of the asbestos debris and other contaminants of concern off-site, at an EPA-approved disposal facility.



Image 1: The exterior of 909 S. Main Street, Rockford, IL.

## What is asbestos and how does it pose a risk to people?

Asbestos is a naturally-occurring mineral material that has a fibrous form. Because of its fiber strength and heat resistance, asbestos has been used in a variety of building construction materials for insulation and as a fire retardant. However, asbestos can cause harmful health effects to those who are exposed, primarily to those who breathe in the fibers. Health issues can include shortness of breath and a persistent cough. Chronic exposure is linked to mesothelioma and lung cancer. As a result, the EPA has banned asbestos use in new construction projects. For more information about asbestos, please visit [www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs).

## How can I keep myself/my family safe?

Health and safety issues associated with asbestos are more pronounced when the fibers are “friable,” meaning they are crumbled or breaking down. Crews have observed friable asbestos at this site. Since the building is deteriorating, the asbestos debris is being broken down further due to air and water exposure.

You can stay safe by keeping your distance from the site and not entering the building. The main risk with asbestos is direct exposure to it. Site crews have noticed signs of trespassing in the building. Community members entering the building are exposed to this material and risk transporting fibers off-site on their clothes and shoes.



Image 2: Friable asbestos on the floor of the site.



Image 3: Aerial view of the Nelson Knitting Site.  
Photo credit: Tetra Tech

## Site Background

The site covers almost 2 acres and is the former location of the Nelson Knitting Company, which opened in 1926. The company produced socks and hosiery items, and they are credited with inventing the tube sock using their circular knitting machine. Most famously, they transformed their red-heeled work sock into the sock monkey toy. The factory closed in 1990, and the site is currently owned by Winnebago County. The asbestos contamination at the site is the result of prior scrapping of metal pipes and other building materials, with little or no abatement of the asbestos insulation surrounding these materials. The site is comprised of a three-level manufacturing building (bordered with a yellow frame in Image 3), a former coal bin, asphalt-paved areas, and some turf grass.